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ABSTRACT

A study to determine the effect of audience on student writers' revision strategies involved 13 college students, seven reasonably competent upper-level writers and six basic writers, who were assigned to write for an hour on a uniform essay topic, composing aloud into a tape recorder as they did so. Six of the upper level students and five of the basic writers had been exposed through previous coursework to the concepts of substantive revision and audience awareness in writing. In measuring revisions, each student's written text and tape-recorded protocol were examined; sense of audience was inferred from the evidence within the protocol and from information elicited during post-composing interviews; and student papers were ranked using a primary trait scale. Results indicated that those students who composed with a strong sense of audience and purpose were less concerned with lexical and scribal matters and more focused upon the ideas that they wished to convey than were the writers without this involvement. This phenomenon was especially striking in the performances of the basic writers. (AEA)

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The Effect of Audience Considerations upon the Revisions of a Group of Basic Writers and More Competent Junior and Senior Writers

Although as both writers and teachers of writing we have long known that revision is an essential part of composing, we have felt enormous frustration when attempting to teach it. We tell our students to revise only to discover that they view revision as recopying for the sake of neatness or as changing a word here and there in order to reduce repetitiveness. However, recent research suggests that we may soon gain some understandings that will enable us to teach this process more effectively. In particular, the work of Nancy Sommers has demonstrated that revision is a continuous and recursive part of the writing process and not just an editing and tidying job tacked on at its end. Sommers defines revision as "a sequence of changes in a composition," an integral part of the ongoing process by which writers shape their writing to bring it into consonance with their intentions--and, according to Sommers, into conformity with a reader's needs.¹

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This connection between the writer's revisions and her awareness of a reader's needs relates revision to contemporary discourse theory, much of which assumes that the writer's purposes vis-a-vis her audience determine the nature of discourse. The taxonomies of Britton, Kinneavy, and Moffett all assume that a writer-reader relationship is an organizing principle of discourse;² yet, as Odell, Cooper, and Courts point out, these assumptions depend upon analyses of products rather than study of what writers actually do when they compose.³

Further, to the extent that writing is a communication from writer to readers, the nature of those readers is not self evident. Traditional rhetoric assumed that an audience had to be persuaded--a persuasion requiring that the rhetor both understand and manipulate his audience. Yet as Russell C. Long has suggested, much of our writing relates us to our readers in ways that are not adversarial and manipulative. Following Walter Ong's famous dictum that "the writer's audience is always a fiction," that the writer, in fact, does not so much direct her discourse to an actual audience "out there" as create a role for the reader that the reader plays for the duration of the reading act, Long questions the value of teaching audience analysis and strategy per se in the writing classroom, suggesting that we ought to teach students to ask not, "Who is my audience?" but rather, "Who do I want my audience to be?" and then give them strategies for creating satisfactory roles for that reader. On the other hand, Mike Rose has recently stated that teaching students to write to a variety of audiences--even writer-created ones--is a waste of time; rather, Rose suggests, we need to teach students how to write more effectively for the professors and instructors who are their only actual audiences.⁴ Thus at a time when textbooks are finally considering the writer's audience, its conceptual basis is in question.

Yet the issue of audience is paramount when we discuss revision. In studying the revision practices of student and experienced writers, Sommers has found that in their revising experienced writers are very much aware of a reader--that, in fact, they have internalized an audience "whose existence and whose expectations influence their revision process. . . . The anticipation of a reader's judgment causes a feeling of dissonance when the writer recognizes incongruities between intention and

execution." And Sommer then discusses some ways in which experienced writers, aware of their readers' probable responses, devise strategies and shape their material accordingly.⁵

The issues of both revision and audience awareness become even more vexing when we deal with student writers, especially basic or remedial-level ones. Although experienced composers may indeed shape their writing in response to an internalized reader, students approach the matter quite differently, as the studies of Sommers, Lillian Bridwell, and Sondra Perl have shown: rather than revising to develop or clarify ideas and structures, students view revision as largely a lexical process involving only the manicuring of words and style or the eradication of errors. Sommers has found, in fact, that student writers often lessen the effectiveness of their writing in the process or revising it, tending "to follow rigid rules," but applying them without "any sense of the relation of those rules to the larger goals and processes that achieve and, to some extent, define those goals."⁶

Linda Flower has suggested that in writing we engage in a two-step sequence, first of all simply retrieving the information that we need in an order--often chronological and associational--that makes that information most easily accessible to us, and then reshaping it conceptually and structurally to be informative to readers. Flower calls the products of these two processes "writer-based" and "reader-based" prose. She hypothesizes that experienced writers can engage in these operations almost simultaneously but that novices, unable to juggle all the constraints of the composing process, must first produce writer-based prose and only then shape it into a reader-based product.⁷ Clearly, this reshaping requires a writer's revising with an awareness that a reader is other than herself.

Now basic and remedial-level writers notoriously produce writer-based prose, and attempts to teach them to convert that prose into a reader-based product are often discouraging. In their writing, most basic writers display evidence of what Piaget calls "cognitive egocentrism" and what others have termed "field dependency."⁸ That is, they seem unable to detach themselves from their own frames of reference and infer how someone else might respond to a piece of information; in psychologist John Flavell's terms, they have not developed "role-taking ability."⁹ They cannot imagine a consciousness different from their own, and they seem unable, often, to distinguish between what they have thought and what they have actually written, evidently assuming that their readers have access to their minds as well as to the text they have produced. Psychologist William Perry suggests that such behavior reflects embeddedness within one's own context and an inability to perceive its relativity to other contexts.¹⁰

Now logically, teaching basic writers about audience considerations should help them to revise more effectively, for making them aware of their readers' needs ought to convince them that they must reshape their writer-based products into reader-based ones; further, such instruction should persuade them that if they are to be effective with their readers, they must engage them at the level of ideas. Yet as anyone who has tried such teaching with basic writers knows, the results are equivocal. Seemingly no amount of audience analyzing guarantees that basic writers will produce substantial, complete, and clear messages for their readers let alone persuasive ones. And what is true in extremity for basic writers is so to a lesser degree for most undergraduates. In general, students' difficulties in producing reader-based prose suggest limitations that cannot be overcome by mere cautionary injunctions to "think about your reader."

Yet even in the face of these rather discouraging results, I suspect that instructors committed to a rhetorical model of composition will still be reluctant to abandon work with audience in teaching basic and other student writers. There are simply too many theoretical reasons why such strategies ought to be effective for us easily to relinquish them.

It seems crucial, then, that we discover just what the student writer's--and especially the basic writer's--relationship to her audience is and to what extent these novice writers conceptualize an audience and attend to its needs while they are composing and shaping their writing.

In order to investigate some of these questions and to identify issues that merit further study, I conducted an exploratory and descriptive research project involving a small group of students at Skidmore College in New York. The subjects were seven reasonably competent junior- and senior-level writers and six basic writers.¹¹ All subjects wrote for an hour on a uniform essay topic and, as they wrote, talked out loud into a tape recorder in order to produce a protocol of their composing processes. (I now believe that the one-hour limitation was a questionable restriction, but at the time I felt it necessary in order to replicate conditions of an earlier study.) Shortly after the composing session, I also conducted a retrospective interview with each student in order to discover as much as I could about the writer's decisions during the composing process. None of the subjects knew exactly what I was investigating; I told them merely that I was "exploring the composing process."

Six of the seven upper-level students had, the prior semester, been members of a course in the peer-tutoring of writing, and five of the basic writers had been enrolled in three sections of a basic writing course. All basic writing instructors used the same curriculum, and each

of these basic writers worked with a peer tutor trained in the peer-tutoring class. Before their enrollment in these courses, only one out of these eleven students had ever had instruction about writing for a reader, and the prose of all these writers showed informational and contextual lacunae of the writer-based variety.

In both courses, the peer tutors' and the basic writers', students had engaged in a sequence of writing assignments that required them regularly to revise their papers substantively as well as syntactically and gave them techniques for doing so. As part of each writing assignment, students responded to each other's papers and had their papers evaluated by the instructor. Then, on the basis of those responses and their own reassessments of the first version of the paper, they produced a revision, which they handed in for a grade. They were encouraged not to view "version one" of their paper as a first draft, and were, in fact, required to hand in at least one prior draft with that version. If the revisions that they made between versions one and two of the paper were not substantive, the paper's grade was apt to be lowered rather than raised. Additionally, as part of the critiquing process, instructors gave them specific advice about how to revise the paper's large concepts and structures. First versions were graded on these large structures only and not on syntax and usage.

In the same way, they had all been taught about shaping their writing for an audience and had performed explicit assignments that required them both to analyze the backgrounds and probable viewpoints of those students to whom they were writing (peers in the writing classes) and to think about what information they would need to make clear to those readers if they were to be understood. Classroom discussion stressed how readers

would be apt to respond to particular passages in a paper and how writers could control a reader's responses by their rhetorical choices. In their critiques of each other's papers, students were encouraged to ask questions about any point they did not fully understand or about which they wanted more information. All these exercises were formulated to make basic writers aware of the "otherness" of their readers and of the writer's consequent need to anticipate what a reader would and would not understand or believe. Tutors performed similar assignments in audience analysis and strategy.

After this semester-long instruction, students were asked for their final assignments to write an argumentative letter to a person or group outside the class and to persuade that readership to take some action. As part of this assignment, they learned about Rogerian rhetoric and tried to anticipate their readers' probable responses to the topic, areas of anxiety and resistance, and so on.

In preparation for their writing, I gave students in all four classes a model paper I had written on a topic whose rhetorical situation was identical to that which these students would, four weeks later, write about for the study, and I described for students the audience analysis I had done and the strategy that I had formulated; this material was discussed in all four classes. I include all this information to suggest the extent to which these students had been exposed to the concepts of both substantive revision and audience awareness in writing.

The project's other two subjects were students who had not had this instruction. One was a junior business major who had taken a traditional freshman composition course and a course in business communications. The other was a basic writer, also a junior, who had completed the basic writing course three years earlier at a time when it did not include such

systematic instruction in revision and audience awareness; after finishing the basic writing class, this student had also taken a regular freshman writing course.

The study's writing topic asked students to imagine that they were speaking as members of a panel addressing an audience in their hometown community. They were supposed to be part of a day-long adult-educational program on the subject of marijuana, and their purpose was to speak as typical college students, giving their views on the subject and their reasons for those views. With them on the panel was a group of speakers representing the entire spectrum of positions on this issue--a policeman, a representative of a committee to legalize marijuana, and so on. Students were also informed that their talks would later be published in the local newspaper and so should be carefully constructed. This assignment was identical to the one I had modeled except that I had written on the topic of abortion rather than marijuana, and the hypothetical panel's makeup had been adjusted accordingly.

In conducting the study, I have focused upon revisions, following Nancy Sommers in assuming that "revision" includes any changes that a writer makes in the course of producing a composition.¹² I reasoned that studying writers' oral or written changes as they composed would show me their shaping principles and strategies, and especially whether they thought at all about an audience as they wrote. That is, if Linda Flower is right about the transformation of writer-based to reader-based prose, it is audience considerations that trigger this transformation. I compared basic writers with more accomplished and somewhat older students (rather than with expert adult writers) in order to ascertain what we can reasonably expect from student writers.

In measuring a writer's revision operations, I examined both the text and the protocol of the composing session. I counted every change as a revision, whether it was made before or after words had been committed to paper, for I reasoned that all a writer's changes reflect strategic choices. Roughly following Nancy Sommers, I measured four kinds of revision operations--deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering--and four levels of revision--punctuation, word, phrase, and sentence.¹³ I also classified each operation according to its concern, and here I examined two large categories: formal concerns and semantic ones. "Formal" included changes made for scribal or graphic reasons, for spelling, grammar (including usage), or syntactical and larger structural relationships. "Semantic concerns" covered revisions to improve diction, to clarify or amplify a word or phrase, to change meaning at the local level, or to change the composition's thematic concerns.

Because student writers often do not think aloud about their readers in the ways that skilled adults do, I inferred a writer's sense of audience not only from the evidence within the protocol but also from the text and the writer's reports during the post-composing interviews. In these interviews, to avoid influencing subjects by my own suggestions, I asked no questions about audience until the student had indicated that he or she had had an audience in mind. If writers did not themselves mention audience, I finally asked them directly whether or not they had imagined an audience as they wrote and, if so, the effect of that conception upon their writing. I had earlier instructed these subjects not to let me "put words in their mouths" and not to be afraid to answer a question with a "no." Evidently they took me at my word, because a number of them staunchly insisted that they absolutely had not changed their papers because of audience considerations.

On the basis of both a point system and a holistic ranking, I classified three of the tutor-writers as having both a strong sense of a general audience and a strong degree of purpose vis-a-vis that audience; two others showed a moderate awareness of audience that focused more upon me as reader than upon the audience specified in the assignment and scarcely even a moderate degree of purpose, while one had little audience awareness and no purpose apart from expressing her own point of view. The non-tutor had a moderate awareness of audience and a strong degree of purpose about her writing.

Of the five basic writers with audience instruction, two showed both a strong sense of audience and a strong purpose with respect to that audience. The other three had a slight awareness of audience at most, and it apparently influenced their writing only tangentially. The basic writer with no instruction in audience also had very little sense of a readership, and her writing was influenced minimally, if at all, by it (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Two trained graduate students and I ranked these students' papers, using a primary trait scale that evaluated structure, logic, depth and complexity of a paper's argument, its clarity of meaning and effectiveness vis-a-vis a reader, and its establishment of an appropriate and credible persona for the writer. The scale did not attempt to assess sophisticated manipulations of audience or persona since it had been my experience that such strategies were beyond most student writers. In placing the papers

into "high," "medium," and "low" categories, we achieved 100% agreement; in ranking papers within each of those categories, we achieved 100% agreement in rankings of the "high" papers, 86.4% in the "medium," and 83% in the "low" categories. In rankings in each of the latter two categories, we disagreed about the placement and level of two slots and rankings, in both cases two of the judges rating one student higher and another lower while a third reversed that order. The rankings shown in Table 1 reflect an average of the judges' scores.

Not surprisingly, most of the tutors' papers and the paper of the junior non-basic writer were better than those of the basic writers. However, within these rankings, the four best papers were written by those subjects with the strongest sense of a generalized audience (as distinguished from focus upon me as reader). Tutors produced the top three of these papers, the junior non-basic writer the fourth.

The biggest surprise, however, was the ranking of one of the basic writers' papers above two of those produced by the tutors, and this was the basic writer who had an extremely high sense of audience and purpose with respect to that audience--although undoubtedly she would have placed lower had we also rated papers for syntax and usage. The other basic writer with a strong sense of audience and purpose placed at the lower position of the "moderate" range of papers, above the other four basic writers; lowest placement of all went to the basic writer with no systematic instruction in audience awareness or revision (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Although my sample is too small to have more than anecdotal significance, I will describe what my measurements of revision operations revealed and then offer some observations and inferences about the material generated by these subjects--texts, protocols, and interviews. I should add that the best tutor-writer did not produce a protocol whose revisions I could chart, and so her measurements are not included in the data although I will discuss her writing later.

Subjects made an average of 29.5 revisions each, ranging from a high of 56 to a low of 12. Looking at the kinds of revisions that these writers performed, we find that 63.4% of the tutors' changes could be classified as substantive compared to 45% of the basic writers'; if we subtract all operations made for diction--the most superficial level of substantive concern--we find that 37% of the tutors' operations and 25% of the basic writers' dealt with higher-level semantic matters--those involving amplification, clarification, local meaning, and theme; the uninstructed students' figures were markedly lower (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Examining revisions involving higher-level structures--phrases and sentences rather than words and phonemes--we find that 36% of the tutors' decisions were at this level and 20% of the basic writers'. In the category of formal concerns, 15% of the tutors' revisions were high-level ones involving syntactical relationships rather than usage and scribal matters, while only 5% of the basic writers' revisions dealt with these structural relationships. Finally, at the other end of the revision

taxonomy, the level of spelling and handwriting, 1% of the tutors' revisions and 4% of the basic writers' were for spelling. However, while the tutors were in their revisions concerned only 8% of the time with graphics--essentially, handwriting--the basic writers made 29% of their revision operation at this level; both of the uninstructed students performed around 40% of their revisions for graphics--that is, merely the correct writing of words.

Thus what emerges is a profile consistent with what other researchers have reported: in their composing, student writers are primarily concerned with the surface of what they write, devoting most of their energy in revision to changing words and attending to usage and mechanics. This situation is especially acute among basic writers; in this study, basic writers devoted almost a third of their revision operations to handwriting and spelling. As Lillian Bridwell, Sondra Perl, and Sharon Pianko have observed, this preoccupation with correctness precludes their ever becoming conceptually involved with their writing.¹⁴

Significantly, these subjects made almost no revision decisions involving "reordering," an operation that works with the logical arrangement of ideas: tutors made a total of three such revisions, basic writers and uninstructed students none. In part, this failure to restructure may have been a function of the writing task's time limitations. In their interviews, several tutors said that they were unhappy with their essay's organization and would, upon revision, change the order in which they presented their ideas; however, few of the basic writers mentioned similar concerns, noting instead that, given additional time to revise, they would look at grammar.

Yet when we examine the revision patterns of those subjects who manifested a high degree of audience awareness and a sense of purpose with respect to their audiences, a somewhat different picture emerges. These writers made far more revisions for substantive reasons than did the low-audience group, and the differences are especially dramatic in the patterns of the basic writers: those basic writers with high audience awareness performed 80% of their decisions for substantive reasons as compared with 45% for the group mean. In the same way, basic writers with a strong sense of audience made over twice as many high-level revisions, both substantive and structural, as did other members of their group. Striking differences also appear in the categories involving handwriting and spelling. Those tutor-writers with a strong sense of audience made a third fewer revisions for handwriting and spelling than did the rest of the group; basic writers with a strong sense of audience performed only an eighth as many such operations as did the other members of the group-- 6 1/2% as compared with 48% (see Tables 3 and 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

Although these results are descriptive only, they pose some intriguing questions for further investigation, for they suggest that those student writers with a high sense of audience and purpose were far less concerned than their peers with surface details of the writing and far more involved with the substance of what they were composing. Of course, this difference could result from differences in writing competencies; for example, the tutor who wrote the best paper of the group

(and whose revision measurements are not included in these figures) had sufficient command of written language to conceptualize what she wanted to say, mentally formulate her written structures, and then transfer them to the page virtually without change, either oral or written. Clearly, a writer with this degree of proficiency will not make many revisions for mechanical and low-level structural reasons.

Yet this skill-level was not characteristic of the two audience-oriented tutors whose operations I was able to measure. In particular, one of them, a student with non Standard-English language patterns, was prone to errors in grammar, spelling, and handwriting and thus might have been expected to focus upon these areas in his revisions--as he had done when I first encountered him as a writing student. Yet although he performed 56 revision operations in his essay, only 5 of them were for grammar, handwriting, or spelling even though his protocol showed that he was aware of misspelling words. The point is that he was concerned enough with getting his ideas across to his readers that he did not stop to address these errors, instead saying such things as, "That's spelled wrong but I'm not going to worry about it now," and so on. The second tutor with high audience awareness tended to produce syntactically convoluted and sometimes incoherent sentences. At times in his protocol he noted that his syntax was getting away from him, but although he revised some of it as he wrote, he more often said, "I can come back to that later and rewrite it." Out of his total of 22 revision operations, 3 concerned grammar and syntax and 2 handwriting while 16 dealt with semantic concerns. Thus both of these writers could suspend local concerns about style and correctness in order to focus upon the more global conceptual ones.

The two basic writers with a strong sense of audience and purpose showed even more dramatic patterns. One was a poor speller with dialect variance in her written language; yet 60% of her revisions were substantive. The other basic writer had never mastered cursive writing, and so writing itself was an arduous physical task for him; further, his syntax was often tangled and incoherent, and he described himself as a poor writer who avoided taking risks in order to avoid making errors. Yet he made all of his revision decisions on substantive grounds; the figures for these two writers compare with 35%, 28½%, and 36% substantive revisions for the other three basic writers and 17% for the uninstructed basic writer--figures suggesting that the basic writers who focused upon their audiences were twice or three times as concerned with the substance of what they composed as were those with low or nonexistent audience awareness. The papers of the two basic writers with high audience involvement were riddled with errors and syntactical tangles--but then so were the papers of the four basic writers who had revised largely at the local level--and these latter papers were inferior in other ways to those of the two writers with a high sense of audience. Further, I know that, except perhaps for the uninstructed basic writer, all of these developmental students had similar levels of writing ability and intelligence.

This leads me, then, to come of this project's implications. At both levels, those students strongly attuned to a general audience produced papers better on the whole than those written by students with low audience involvement. That is, these papers all had a clear point or position that the writer wanted to establish; they all offered evidence to support that point and then developed that evidence, and the papers' discussions focused upon the writers' theses. In addition, the

students with a sense of audience composed papers whose tone and voice were natural and persuasive, and they expressed themselves more lucidly than did their non-audience peers, explaining terms, clarifying references, and so on--although the two basic writers performed somewhat unevenly in this regard in ways suggesting that even the basic writers strongly attuned to their readers' needs at times found it difficult to know just what those needs were. However, they did better in this respect than their non audience-oriented peers. Among the tutor-writers, those with the strong sense of audience and purpose anticipated their readers' objections to their points and dealt with them in their papers as did the uninstructed junior; as a result, their arguments were more credible than those of the other writers. The tutors also reported choosing both their arguments and their ways of presenting them according to what they wanted to accomplish with their audiences, and their protocols supported these reports.

Interestingly, each one of these students wrote to a different readership, recasting the assignment's stipulated audience in ways that apparently made it easier for the student to become involved with that audience--a strategy suggesting that Walter Ong is right in maintaining that writers create their own readers. The best writer converted her audience to a group of high school students and then tried to persuade them not to waste their time getting high. The other audience-oriented writers made other adjustments--none of them wrote to readers quite like those specified in the assignment; rather, they created audiences whom they cared about convincing of something and then proceeded to try to do just that. The most intriguing variation of this audience creation came from the tutor who converted the panel into a jury in a jury box with himself arguing in front of it. Interestingly, none of these writers seemed

aware that they had changed the audience from that designated in the assignment. Further, although the assignment did not ask for persuasive writing, the best writers made it persuasive; that is, they were committed enough to their thesis to want to present it as convincingly as possible to their readers.

On the other hand, the writers without a strong sense of general audience and purpose wrote papers that lacked a point. One of the tutors with low audience involvement--she reported writing in part for an undefined "reader" and in part for me--produced a well organized and well supported essay giving reasons for and against the legalization of marijuana. The paper was, however, stilted and "academic" in the worst sense of that term, and seemed, finally, to lack any genuine focus: the writer conveyed a lot of information but to no particular end. She reported having thought about the assigned audience at the beginning of the hour but having lost that awareness as she continued writing. The other tutor with a degree of audience awareness wrote a poorly organized paper devoid of any real point until near the end; rather, he went into a detailed history of his own experience with marijuana--a typically writer-based strategy--a history that was well and engagingly written but not really to the assignment's purpose since it did not clearly support the point that he finally made. During the interview, he disclosed that he had really written to me and that, as a result, he had been far more frank than he might have with another audience--even though at the beginning of the hour he, too, had briefly considered the panel and audience for whom he was ostensibly writing. This slippage from the assignment's general audience to a more immediate and familiar one--me--is like a reversal of the process that Moffett describes in his theory of

discourse, a process that postulates an increasing distance between writer and audience as the discourse moves up the abstraction ladder, with the most abstract and theoretical writing directed to the most general audience.¹⁵ The student's substitution of a familiar for a more general audience and of personal narrative for argument suggests that he was uncomfortable with a high degree of abstraction--a speculation supported by his productions in the peer-tutors' course, all of which were well written but limited to the "familiar" essay even when that form was not an appropriate response to an assignment.

The last tutor, the one who indicated that she had almost no sense of audience--either the one stipulated in the assignment or me--wrote what was essentially a private meditation musing about some of her concerns over young children's uses of marijuana. In her interview, she said that this subject had been troubling her lately and so she wrote about it. Yet although her paper certainly revealed her own worry, it did not provide a very telling argument on the subject. Perhaps not coincidentally, this tutor was the only one who did not use all the time allotted for the assignment and then wish for more.

Among the basic writers, both of the students with high audience-awareness felt a strong purpose with respect to their imagined audiences--and both recast their audiences: one saw himself talking to a group of elementary-aged children in a school cafeteria setting; the other visualized herself speaking to members of the community in which she went to college. Both students wrote focused and well organized if naively argued papers with a distinct point. The better of the two had a distinct flair for the dramatic and really threw herself into the persona that the assignment asked her to assume. She made up illustrations right and left to

support her points, and while some of these exempla strained credulity, nevertheless her paper was a good one within the limitations of her own naïveté. She even mimicked the tone and manner that I had used in the model paper (the paper which I had analyzed for students during the basic-writing course), extending that manner to address her audience as "neighbors," "my friends," and so on, and identifying herself a number of times as a college student concerned about her community. She had displayed this same flair for dramatization in papers written for me during the basic-writing course, but frequently it had been out of control and completely unfocused; she would, for example, compose pages and pages of dramatic dialogue that had nothing to do with any point she was supposedly making. Yet in this paper, everything worked toward her thesis, and her dramatic propensities evidently helped her create a persona.

The other basic writer with high audience involvement evidently cared a great deal about persuading the elementary-age school children whom he addressed not to use marijuana. He reported thinking a lot about what these children would need to know in order to understand him and about an approach that would be persuasive and, in his words, "pleasing" and not "preachy." Although his paper had some informational gaps in it, and although he was not entirely successful in achieving an argument and tone that would be appealing to elementary-age children, he wrote what was for him a good paper and one that was generally persuasive.

By contrast, the other three basic writers, whose sense of audience was low to non-existent, wrote poorly focused and rambling essays that moved towards no particular point. As Linda Flower would put it, they simply performed a "memory dump" on the subject of marijuana use, writing down information in the order in which it occurred to

them and then stopping when they had divested themselves of their minds' contents on the matter.¹⁶ Their papers all had the quality of personal reverie, not of focused exposition or argument. Yet none of these writers indicated that she would revise her paper conceptually given the time to do so although two of them indicated that they would revise for grammar and one for grammar and "organization"--this despite a semester's systematic work on substantive revision. And unlike the writers with a strong sense of audience, all of whom complained about feeling pressed for time, none of these writers used the full hour available.

I asked all subjects if they had anticipated that someone in their audience might disagree with what they were saying and, if so, if they had attempted in their writing to rebutt those differing points of view. The tutors with high audience involvement and purpose had both anticipated such disagreement and had attempted to counter it; those with a lower sense of involvement had thought of opposing points of view but had avoided dealing with them--in one case, by not being "too dogmatic" (the student explained that she didn't take a very decisive stand on any issue so that an audience could not have much basis for disagreeing with her!).

The two basic writers with high audience involvement anticipated objections but dealt with them unevenly, in some cases trying to meet and answer them and in others avoiding them. The other basic writers made no attempt to deal with possible disagreement, stating that "they simply wanted to give their own view"; further, they insisted that regardless of the audience for which they were writing, they would do the same thing and would change nothing they had written except the grammar--because, as one basic writer put it, "I wrote The Truth." As I have

argued elsewhere,¹⁷ this seeming ingenuousness reflects not so much naivité as it does, I suspect, a cognitive inability to come to terms with what Perry calls "contextual relativism."¹⁸ That is, these students were aware that many people hold many views on any given topic, but they did not feel comfortable about sifting and weighing those views to achieve a position of their own. While they might have had a personal position, they held it in isolation from the viewpoints of others. One could, of course, maintain that the assignment asked only that subjects give their own views on the issue of marijuana use. Yet as Perry suggests, mature people have developed reasoned positions on crucial issues, positions that assess the range of possible viewpoints and then make a commitment to the stance that the individual judges most sound.¹⁹ Any college student these days had had to confront the issues of marijuana and drug use; that these students could not or would not commit themselves to some position on the matter suggests cognitive immaturity, an immaturity that is probably as much a function of inexperience as of age.²⁰

Perhaps it is also cognitive immaturity that makes it difficult for these students to conceptualize an audience and then assume a persona with respect to it. In what was to me one of the project's most interesting developments, four of the low audience-involvement writers--two tutors and two basic writers--said to me near the end of their interviews that, in effect, they now realized that when they wrote, they should pay more attention to their audiences--as if they had never heard of this idea before, as if they had not participated for thirteen weeks in courses in which they were reminded several times weekly that writers should address themselves to their readers' needs, and as if they had not four weeks earlier read and discussed the analysis of my audience strategy and the

persona I adopted in appearing as a panel member before my home community to give my views on the subject of abortion. Since I know that none of these students was feeble-minded, this kind of gap suggests to me that they were unable to absorb and act upon this information or to generalize from the one set of circumstances--speaking about abortion--to the other--speaking about marijuana--because, for whatever reason, the complexity of the writing task was still beyond their experience and ability. A next research step would be to ask such students specifically to revise their writing for an audience's needs in order to see if they could do so.²¹

So should we conclude that it is pointless to teach college-age writers about audience considerations? I think quite the contrary. Although it is clearly difficult to work with student/audience relationships--in this study, only half of those students who had had such instruction utilized it effectively in their writing--the fact remains that those students with audience awareness did write better papers than the others in their groups and that they did make different kinds of revision decisions, decisions that suggest that they were focused upon ideas and meaning rather than upon correctness; and these differences seem to have been a function of their strong sense of purpose with respect to the audiences they had created. And, in fact, the tutors' writing especially showed uniform improvement in these respects compared to what it had been at the beginning of the prior term. Further, even those tutors who lacked a strong sense of audience purpose and involvement wrote with greater clarity and with more extensive development and specificity than they had before instruction. Such facts suggest that these cognitively more mature students could and did benefit from instruction

about audience--although of course this was not the only kind of writing instruction they had received.

Although the results with the basic writers are more uneven, given the difficulty of working with these students, I feel that substantial improvement in two out of five writers isn't bad. And again, the other three basic writers, although still producing writer-based prose, composed texts that were clearer and more fully developed than those they had produced at the prior term's beginning. The percentages of revision decisions of all instructed students that involved clarification and amplification support these observations. They range from a low of 7% to a high of 25% and compare with 0% for both uninstructed writers; four of the instructed students made as many or more revisions to amplify or clarify as they did to improve diction. The research of Sommers and Bridwell reveals that lexical change to avoid "repetition" is the favorite (and often the only) revision operation that uninstructed students perform.²² Thus the instructed students' many revisions to clarify and amplify suggest that these writers had, at least to a degree, learned that terms and ideas must be adequately explained to a reader. Thus although we cannot expect an emphasis upon audience to solve all our students' writing problems, this study suggests that we need to do more and not less teaching of audience awareness. Although students find it cognitively difficult to conceptualize and then respond to an audience, by the same token, requiring them to do just that may well help them to detach themselves enough from their own contexts to be able to make their messages clear to a reader.²³

Even though it may be unproductive to teach undergraduate writers sophisticated strategies in audience manipulation, it seems very much to

the point to help them develop a purpose with respect to a particular audience--ideally, an audience that they can define themselves within the assignment's broad parameters--and a strategy for achieving that purpose with that audience. That is, I suspect that the junior business major produced a better paper than did three of the tutors because she had a fairly strong sense of writing for an audience and a purpose with respect to that audience. Of course, she may simply have been a good writer to begin with (just as the one uninstructed basic writer, who had a severe writing disability, was an unusually poor one). However, given some of her stylistic clumsiness, I am more inclined to believe her course in business communications, which had focused upon writing to get business done in the real world, had given her a transactional view of writing that enabled her to compose a good essay.

I also think it significant that all the writers with high audience involvement reported that as they wrote, they had distinct although not necessarily highly specific mental pictures of the audience they were addressing. Some students reported that they even visualized members of their audience shaking their heads in agreement or disagreement as the writer delivered his or her remarks--and it appears to have been that strong sense of communication to particular recipients that moved these writers to shape their compositions to embody that communication as effectively as possible.

The project's results also suggest the value of requiring students to write for somewhat remote rather than immediate audiences--at least as a goal. That is, the subjects in this study who directed their writing primarily to me, the teacher, composed less effective papers than did those students who wrote to more general audiences, in

part I suspect because they knew me so well that writing to me was almost like writing to themselves. Thus although it may seem contrived to postulate fictitious audiences in the writing classroom, doing so may help students to produce reader-based products that are clear, focused, and well argued. I would add one note of caution, however: all the instructed students in this study had spent a semester of composing papers to their peers and thus had developed some proficiency in writing clearly and effectively to an immediate audience. Basic writers in particular would find it difficult at the beginning of their instruction to write well for a more remote audience and would need to be taken step-by-step in that direction.²⁴ And of course it is always sound pedagogy to begin with easier and move gradually to more difficult tasks. Most useful of all is probably the situation requiring students to write for audiences outside their own frames of reference who will actually respond to the writing. Although such conditions are difficult to establish for classroom writing, they are not impossible. For example, one business communications instructor whom I know enlists local business executives to give students feedback on their written term-projects.

Finally, this study reinforces what other researchers have suggested--that in teaching students about revision, we must continue to stress the fact that writers should first of all focus upon the shaping of ideas to achieve a purpose with respect to their readers and only then turn their attention to matters of style and correctness. Perhaps we need to tie revision instruction directly to audience awareness by asking students, for example, to imagine questions that their readers might ask about each key point that they have written or by asking them to speculate--and write out--how they think their readers will respond to them on a paragraph by paragraph basis.

Although the results I have outlined are suggestive rather than definitive, they do indicate that those students who composed with a strong sense of audience and purpose were less concerned with lexical and scribal matters and more focused upon the ideas that they wished to convey than were writers without this involvement. This phenomenon was especially striking in the performances of the basic writers. And given the extreme difficulty of moving developmental students from the production of writer- to reader-based prose and from the scribal and lexical to the semantic levels of focus, these results merit further investigation.

Janice N. Hays
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Notes

¹Nancy I. Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," College Composition and Communication, 31 (December, 1980), p. 380 and passim.

²See James Britton, Tony Burgess, Nancy Martin, Alex McLeod, and Harold Rosen, The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18 (1975; rpt. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1978); James Kinneavy, "The Basic Aims of Discourse," College Composition and Communication, 20 (December, 1969), pp. 297-304, and A Theory of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971); James Moffett, "I, You, and It," College Composition and Communication, 16 (December, 1965), pp. 243-256, and Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

³Lee Odell, Charles Cooper, and Cynthia Courts, "Discourse Theory: Implications for Research in Composing," in Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell, eds., Research on Composing: Points of Departure (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1978), p. 4.

⁴Russell C. Long, "Writer-Audience Relationships: Analysis or Invention?" College Composition and Communication, 31 (May, 1980), pp. 221-226; Walter J. Ong, S. J., "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," PMLA, 90 (January, 1975), pp. 9-21; Mike Rose, "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer's Block," College Composition and Communication, 31 (December, 1980), p. 72.

⁵Sommers, p. 385 and passim; indeed, A. D. Van Nostrand and the proponents of "functional writing" assume that writing is a contractual relationship between writer and reader and that both composing and revision are powered by the writer's obligation to supply readers with what they need. See A. D. Van Nostrand, C. H. Knoblauch, Peter J. McGuire, and Joan Pettigrew, Functional Writing (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 92-93.

⁶Lillian Bridwell, "Revising Strategies in Twelfth Grade Students' Transactional Writing," Research in the Teaching of English, 14 (October, 1980), p. 206; Sondra Perl, "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers," Research in the Teaching of English, 13 (December, 1979), pp. 326, 328; Nancy I. Sommers, "Intentions and Revisions: The Structure of the Revision Process," paper presented at the 1980 convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communications, Washington, D.C., p. 5.

⁷Linda Flower, "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing," College English, 41(September, 1979), pp. 1-12.

⁸See John H. Flavell, Cognitive Development (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 124-125, 175-178; Martha Maxwell, Improving Student Learning Skills (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979), pp. 210-211; Perl, p. 332; and Mary Ann Spencer Pulaski, Understanding Piaget: An Introduction to Children's Cognitive Development, revised and expanded edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 42-47 and passim.

⁹See John H. Flavell, P. T. Botkin, D. L. Fry, Jr., J. W. Wright, and P. E. Jarvis, The Development of Role-Taking and Communication Skills in Children (New York: Wiley, 1968); and John H. Flavell, "The Development of Inferences about Others," in T. Mischel, ed., Understanding Other Persons (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), pp. 66-116.

¹⁰William G. Perry, Jr., Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years, A Scheme (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1968), p. 62, pp. 59-71, and passim.

¹¹Students were classified as basic writers on the basis of their college placement scores, their performance on Educational Testing Service's Diagnostic Test of Language Skills, and a sample of their writing.

¹²Sommers, "Revision Strategies . . . ," p. 380.

¹³Sommers, "Revision Strategies . . . ," p. 380.

¹⁴Bridwell, pp. 210-211; Perl, pp. 333, 334; Sharon Pianko, "A Description of the Composing Processes of College Freshman Writers," Research in the Teaching of English, 13 (February, 1979), p. 13.

¹⁵Moffett, "I, You, and It," pp. 244-246.

¹⁶Linda Flower, Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p. 154.

¹⁷Janice Hays, "The Development of Discursive Maturity in College-Age Writers," paper delivered at the New York College English Association Conference "The Writer's Mind: Writing as a Mode of Thinking," Saratoga Springs, NY, 1980.

¹⁸Perry, pp. 110-111, 208, and passim.

¹⁹Perry, pp. 153ff.

²⁰Perry, pp. 213ff; Perry follows Piaget in suggesting that beyond a certain level, cognitive development probably depends upon environment and experience rather than being a matter of simple chronology.

²¹I wish to thank Linda Flower for this suggestion.

²²Bridwell, pp. 210-211, 217-218; Sommers, "Revision Strategies . . . ," pp. 381-383.

²³Studies conducted by Scardamalia, Bereiter, and McDonald suggest that sensitizing children about possible audience reactions to a communication can improve the effectiveness of their own writing for the same communications situation; Marlene Scardamalia, Carl Bereiter, and James D. S. McDonald, "Role Taking in Written Communication Investigated by Manipulating Anticipatory Knowledge," paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, New Orleans, March, 1977 (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 151 792); Barry M. Kroll has conducted research suggesting that practicing a communicative task can improve written performance of that task; see "Cognitive Egocentrism and the Problem of Audience Awareness in Written Discourse," Research in the Teaching of English, 12 (October, 1978), pp. 269-281; also see Flavell, "The Development of Inferences . . . ," p. 107; and Carl Bereiter, "Development in Writing," in Lee W. Gregg and Erwin R. Steinberg, eds., Cognitive Processes in Writing (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1980), pp. 73-93.

²⁴In a study conducted by Robert J. Bracewell, Marlene Scardamalia, and Carl Bereiter, children wrote more effective communications for a specific peer who would provide feedback on the communication than they did for a general audience of peers; least effective of all were communications for an unidentified "general reader"; see "The Development of Audience Awareness in Writing," paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, March, 1978 (ERIC Reproduction Service Document No. ED 154 433).

Table 1 - Rankings by Subject

Subject	Status	Age	Rank of Paper (1=highest: 13=lowest)	Audience (General & Teacher)		Audience (General Only)		Audience (Teacher Only)		% high-level struct. rev.	% high-level subst. rev.
				Rank (1=high 13=low)	Points (7=high ½=low)	Rank (1=high 13=low)	Points (6=high 0=low)	Rank (1=high 13=low)	Points (2=high 0=low)		
A	Tutor	21	1	4	6	4	5	4	1	no measurements available	
B	Tutor	22	3	3	6½	2	6	8	½	9%	27%
C	Tutor	23	2	1	7	1	6	5	1	14	25
D	Tutor	20	5	7	4	8	2	2	2	8	28
E	Tutor	21	7	5	4½	7	2½	1	2	25	10
F	Tutor	21	8	10	1½	10	1	12	½	14	16
G	Non-Tutor	19	4	6	4	6	3	6	1	8	8
a	BW	21	6	2	7	3	5½	3	1½	7	27
b	BW	19	9	8	4	5	4	11	0	0	28½
c	BW	18	12	13	½	13	0	10	½	20	2
d	BW	20	10	11	½	11	½	13	0	0	14
e	BW	18	11	12	½	12	0	9	½	6	6
f	unin-structed BW	21	13	9	3	9	2	7	1	6	2

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Table 2 - Rankings by Paper

	Paper Rank	General Audience Rank	% sub. rev.	% hi-level rev.	subject/status
HIGH	1	4	no data	no data	A - Tutor
	2	1	77%	38%	C - Tutor
	3	2	73	37	B - Tutor
	4	6	50	8	G - Non-tutor
MEDIUM	5	8	56	44	D - Tutor
	6	3	67	34	a - Basic Writer
	7	7	60	35	E - Tutor
	8	10	51	30	F - Tutor
	9	5	100	50	b - Basic Writer
LOW	10	11	28½	21	d - Basic Writer
	11	12	36	17	e - Basic Writer
	12	13	35½	22	c - Basic Writer
	13	9	17	2	f - Uninstructed Basic Writer

Table 3 -
Revision Operations of Tutors* and of Basic Writers

	Tutors*			Non-Tutor	Instructed Basic Writers			Uninstructed Basic Writer
	All Tutors*	Tutors: Audience*	Tutors: Low Audience	Uninstructed	All Instructed BW's	BW:Aud	BW:No Aud	BW: Un
Av. Number of Revisions	33	39	29.3	12	24.8	14.5	32	48
% Substantive Rev.	63.4%	75%	56%	50%	45%	80%	33%	17%
% High-Level Sub.	37%	38%	36%	8%	25%	41.5%	20%	2%
% Highest Level Sub.	19%	26%	18%	8%	10%	16%	5%	2%
% Phrase/Sentence	34.3%	42%	34%	8%	20%	37%	17%	2%
% High Level Struc.	15%	13%	15%	8%	5%	3.5%	4%	6%
% Graphics/Spelling	9%	4.5%	12%	41%	32%	6.5%	48%	73%
% Graphics	8%	2.5%	9%	41%	29%	6.5%	44%	42%

*Excluding Tutor A, for whom no measurements are available

Table 4 - % Revision Operations by Subject

Sub- ject	Status	Paper Rank	Type				Levels				Concerns									
			sub	del	add	reord	punct	word	phr	sent	Form					Substance				
											graph	sp	gram	rel	tot	dict	clar	local	theme	tot
A	T	1						N	O			D	A	T	A					
B	T	3	59%	23%	18%	0%	4½%	50%	41%	4½%	9%	0%	9%	9%	27%	36%	9%	27%	0%	73%
C	T	2	66	7	23	4	9	53	27	11	0	0	9	14	23	39	13	25	0	77
D	T	5	72	0	28	0	0	64	24	12	12	16	8	8	44	12	16	12	16	56
E	T	7	45	15	35	5	0	70	20	10	0	0	15	25	40	25	25	5	5	60
F	T	8	77	7	16	0	0	63	32	5	5	2	28	14	49	21	14	16	0	51
G	NT	4	50	25	25	0	0	92	0	8	42	0	0	8	50	42	0	8	0	50
a	BW	6	73	0	27	0	0	40	53	7	13	0	13	7	33	33	7	27	0	67
b	BW	9	43	14	43	0	0	86	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	21½	21½	7	100
c	BW	12	51	15½	33½	0	0	87	13	0	38	4½	2	20	64½	13½	20	2	0	35½
d	BW	10	64	0	36	0	0	71½	21½	7	71½	0	0	0	71½	7½	7	7	7	28½
e	BW	11	42	36	22	0	22	67	11	0	22	8	28	6	64	19	11	6	0	36
f	UBW	13	69	12	19	0	0	98	2	0	42	31	4	6	83	15	0	2	0	17